

180
722
77
36
12

Sam Bass, the Train Robber

The Life of Texas' Most Popular Bandit

Harvey N. Castleman



THE LIBRARY
THE UNIVERSITY
OF TEXAS

THE
LOUIS LENZ
COLLECTION

Sam Bass, the Train Robber

The Life of Texas' Most Popular Bandit

Harvey N. Castleman

Copyright, 1944
By E. Haldeman-Julius

HALDEMAN-JULIUS PUBLICATIONS
GIRARD, KANSAS

Printed in the United States of America

SAM BASS, THE TRAIN ROBBER

To a boy brought up in the Middle West 50 years ago, Jesse James was the only top-flight bandit in the world. The story of the James boys, even today, yields nothing to the legends of Robin Hood, Dick Turpin or Claude Duval. But to a boy of the same vintage who was reared in Texas, even Jesse James was nothing in comparison to the splendid figure of Sam Bass, who "whipped the Texas Rangers" in the old ballad. Hundreds of pilgrims still visit his grave at Round Rock every year. Men have come from all parts of the United States, and from several foreign countries, to dig for gold that Bass is said to have buried. There are boys in Texas today who can recite the whole history of Sam Bass, boys who have scarcely heard of Sam Houston or even "Big Foot" Wallace! Texas is still full of old men who claim to have known Bass well, and perhaps some of them really did know him.

One of the strange things about this great Texas hero is the fact that he was not a Texan, or even a Southerner. He came down from the North, at a time when Northern men were not highly regarded in Texas. It has been said that Sam Bass was the first Yankee to become popular in Texas after the Civil War. Some have even intimated that Bass was the *only* Yankee to become popular in Texas, but this latter crack is not intended to be taken seriously.

Sam Bass was born on a farm near Mitchell, Indiana, on July 21, 1851. He was one of a large family, and his father was a prosperous farmer. The mother died when Sam was a child, and one of the older brothers was killed at the battle of Richmond, in 1862. His father died in 1864, and Sam went to live with his Uncle Dave. Dave Sheeks was one of the richest men in the neighborhood, who owned large farms and sawmills, but he worked Sam terribly hard, and gave him no schooling. Sam learned to read "a few short words," but he was never able to write much, although he could sign his name after a fashion.

Most of the talk Sam heard at his uncle's place was concerned with politics, but he took little interest in such matters. Of much greater importance, to his 14-year-old mind, were the doings of the Reno gang, a band of robbers who became notorious all through Indiana and Illinois in the middle 1860's. These desperadoes looted banks, stuck up stages, and robbed trains. They took \$90,000 from an express car only a few miles from Dave Sheeks' home, and \$90,000 was a tremendous sum of money in those days. Most of the Reno boys were captured and lynched, but it was the cleverness of their earlier exploits that impressed young Sam Bass.

For nearly five years Sam lived with Uncle Dave, and worked hard every day, but he never was paid anything more than his board and lodging, with a yearly suit of homespun clothes. Finally Sam announced that he was 18 years old now, and doing a man's work, therefore he ought to have a hired man's wages. At least he should have a horse to ride, and a little spending money on -Saturday. Uncle Dave flew into a rage, and struck at Sam with a chair. Sam dodged, and a few minutes later he walked out of his uncle's house for-

ever. "I'll go West and be a cowboy," said he, "or an Indian fighter like Daniel Boone. Or maybe," he added softly, "I'll take up robbin' folks, like them! Reno boys done!"

Sam knew that a ticket to St. Louis would cost nearly \$10, and he did not have that much money. Just how he got to St. Louis we do not know, but he was there in a few days. It was the first big city Sam had ever seen, but he evidently did not stay there long. Probably he could not get any kind of a job in St. Louis. We next hear of him at Rosedale, Mississippi, where he worked in a sawmill for about a year. He understood that kind of work, because Uncle Dave had operated a similar sawmill back in Indiana.

Not much is known about Sam's life in Rosedale. Wayne Gard, whose book *Sam Bass* is the best biography that has yet appeared, tells us that "Sam had acquired a measure of skill at cards and had learned to handle a six-shooter, but he had gained little else from his stay in Mississippi." Men who knew Sam have said that he was a very poor poker-player, but there is no doubt that he was a good pistol shot. He left Mississippi on horseback when he was about 19, and it seems that he must have earned enough money to buy a horse and saddle. It is possible that he stole the horse, of course, but there is no record of it. As far as is known, Sam had never been in trouble during his residence at Rosedale.

It must have been in 1870 that Sam started out for Texas, riding along with a family named Mays, who traveled in a prairie schooner. It was a long, leisurely journey, and they stopped for some time at Hot Springs, Arkansas, which was already a well-known health resort. The travelers fared well, as there was plenty of game all along the way, and Mrs. Mays was a fine cook. It was in the Fall when they finally drove into Denton, Texas. Here Sam left the Mays party, and got a job on a ranch about 15 miles south of Denton.

A full-fledged cowboy at least, Sam found that he could ride well enough to hold the job, but he had no experience in roping cattle. He worked hard and got along all right, but soon realized that the life of a cowpuncher is not so romantic as it has been cracked up to be. His boyhood dream of becoming an Indian fighter faded too, when he saw seven freighters who had been killed by the Kiowas. The bodies of these men were naked, burned in many places, and stuck full of arrows. "Their private parts," says one chronicler, "had been cut off and stuck in their mouths," and there were other mutilations too unpleasant to be set down here. The sight of these naked twisted corpses impressed Sam Bass with the idea that Indian-fighting is a profession for specialists, and not a good field for dilettantes or amateurs.

Disillusioned about the life of a cowboy, Sam went into Denton and worked a while in the stables of the Lacey House, the best hotel in town. Next he got a job as handyman with W. F. Eagan, sheriff of Denton county. Sam took care of the Eagan horses, milked two cows, cut stove-wood, and split rails to be used in making fences. Later on Eagan went into the freighting business on the side, since there was no railroad in Denton, and everything had to be hauled at least 50 miles by wagon. Sam drove one of Eagan's teams, and made many trips to Dallas and Fort Worth. W. P. Webb who devotes a chapter of his book *The Texas Rangers* to Sam Bass, has this to say: "It was said that the young man was so thrifty and economical that he never paid more than \$5 for a suit of clothes, and that when Dad Eagan sent him to Dallas

to transact business, he had to warn him against working his team and himself on short rations."

So far as is known, Sam had no regular communication with his relatives back in Indiana. But when his sister wrote him that two of his brothers contemplated coming to Texas, he sent a long letter advising them not to come. Texas was a tough place for Hoosier farm-hands. Sam could not write the letter himself, but he dictated it to a neighbor boy named Charlie Brim, and signed SAM BASS in great sprawling capitals at the bottom of the page. It must have been a pretty good letter, since it frightened the boys so that they gave up the idea of making the Texas pilgrimage.

Sam was a grown man now. He was 5 feet 6 inches tall, muscular and well built, but a little stooped, which made him look older than he really was. He had black hair and black eyes, which gave rise to a common report that he was part Indian. People who knew him at this period remember that his speech set him apart from the other young men; Sam still spoke the nasal dialect of rural Indiana, very different from the soft drawl of the Texans. But Sam talked little, so that his accent didn't matter much. He was usually unshaven and always badly dressed. It appears that he had little to do with women, and small interest in his personal appearance. He liked to play cards, but seemed to be more interested in good horses than anything else.

Sam attended all the races at Denton. The standard distance in those days was the quarter mile, and the quarter-horses always ran on a straight track. The horse-players of Denton had established one of these tracks on the prairie just north of the village. There were no seats or grandstands for the spectators, since the boys all came out on horseback anyhow, and were content to sit their horses while the race was run. Every cow-camp had at least one pony which was regarded as fast, and such horses were brought in and raced against animals entered by professionals. Some of these races were very colorful affairs. Considerable amounts of money changed hands. Fights, robberies and killings were not uncommon.

In 1874 Sam somehow obtained enough money to buy a sorrel mare named Jennie—the "Denton mare" mentioned in the Sam Bass ballad:

Sam used to deal in race stock,
One called the Denton mare,
He run her in scrub races
And took her to the Fair.

Horsemen have said that Jennie was a descendant of Steel Dust, a Kentucky quarter-horse celebrated all over the Southwest. Be that as it may, she was fast enough to beat any of the local ponies, and almost immediately Sam began to make a little money. Shortly after this he left Dad Eagan, who was not in sympathy with what he called "horse-jockeys." From 1875 on Sam spent much of his time in saloons and gambling-houses, and associated with disreputable characters of one sort and another. There is no record of his ever having any regular employment after he left Sheriff Eagan in March, 1875.

Bass hired a diminutive Negro jokey named Dick Eidson to ride the mare, and Gard tells us that "she never lost a race when the skinny darky rode her." Henry Underwood, whose main business heretofore had been cutting firewood, now turned horse-trainer and assisted Sam in the racing game. From this time forward it seems that Sam

was always in some sort of difficulty. One story is that he and Underwood doped the horses which were to run against Jennie, by putting "Injun pizen" in their drinking-water. Also he became involved in a lawsuit with one Marcus Milner, who claimed that Sam had cheated him out of a race by intimidating the judges. Sam won the case, but refused to pay his lawyers. Years later one of the attorneys framed a promissory note which poor Sam had signed. His handwriting was uncertain always, and the lawyers made merry over the signature, which looked pretty much like SAM B. ASS! It is said that this note is still in existence, and is now the property of a judge in San Antonio.

Many jockeys in the Texas hinterland rode heavy stock saddles on the track, but the best professionals used much lighter English saddles. Dick Eidson rode without any saddle at all—just daubed a little sorghum on his pants to help him stick to Jennie's back! Not only this, but he dispensed with the bridle too, so that Jennie ran naked except for a rope hackamore. Dick also claimed that the mare could start better from a "dirt footstool"—that is, a pile of earth perhaps two feet high. Sam and Underwood used to go out and build up this footstool in full view of the spectators; if the owner of the other horse objected, Bass would offer to give him a length or two as a handicap. It has been said that Dick Eidson was a good showman rather than a really fine rider, but there is no denying that he won a lot of races. Sam Bass sometimes paid him as much as \$300 for a single race. Dick made side bets also, besides selling tips to unwary strangers.

After the Denton mare had beaten all the race-horses around Denton, Sam took her to the tracks at Fort Worth, Dallas, Grandbury, Saint Joe, Waco and other Texas towns. Having won in all these places, he went up to Fort Sill, in what is now Oklahoma, and matched Jennie against the best horses the Indians had. He won a whole herd of Indian ponies, but the savages claimed they had been cheated and refused to pay the bet. Sam and Underwood went back at night and collected the ponies they had won, plus many others that had not been wagered, and headed for Texas. Shortly after crossing the border they were overtaken by a marshal's posse, but Sam announced that he would "wade knee-deep in blood" rather than give up his winnings. and the officers withdrew without firing a shot.

Shortly after this Bass matched Jennie against a big quarter-horse named Rattler, owned by Buck Tomlin of Tarrant county, Texas. Dick Eidson was not available when Tomlin showed up in Denton with Rattler, so Sam got another jockey, one Harry Hays. Hays was a good man, but he was not familiar with Jennie's peculiarities; he rode her with an ordinary racing saddle, and a conventional bridle. The idea of using a handful of molasses instead of a saddle did not appeal to Hays, and he would not listen to Sam's advice in the matter. The result was that Jennie was beaten. Nearly all the Denton horse-players believed that Jennie was a better horse than Rattler, and some of them alleged that Hays had thrown the race. Bass and Underwood always claimed that they lost a lot of their own money that day, but the local boys did not believe them.

In 1875 Underwood became involved in a street fight at Denton, and when an officer tried to arrest him he fled under fire. Then he and Bass drifted on down to San Antonio, taking Jennie with them, also a jockey named Johnny Hudson. It was at San Antonio that Bass fell in with a bartender known as Joel Collins. Joel had been a cowpuncher,

raised on a ranch near Dallas. He had worked for some of the biggest cow outfits in Texas, and had driven herds up the long trail to Dodge City and Abilene, famous shipping points in Kansas. He was a violent, reckless man who had killed a Mexican or two, but had been acquitted by the courts. Underwood had wandered off somewhere, and Sam and Joel Collins became very chummy indeed.

Sam persuaded Collins to give up bartending and travel about with Jennie. Collins passed as the owner and manager of the mare, while Sam pretended to be a stranger. He served as a kind of shill, whose business it was to induce people to bet against Jennie. By means of this strategem they made good money along the border for a while, and did not hesitate to cross into Mexico whenever the picking appeared to be good. This went on for several months, but finally Joel Collins tired of the game, and persuaded Sam to sell Jennie to a dealer they met in San Antonio. They then bought a bunch of cattle—part of them from Joel's brother Joe, on credit—and started up the long trail to Kansas.

Collins hired three experienced cowpokes, and the Bass-Collins herd moved slowly northward. Weeks and months passed on the road, and the boys somehow acquired more cattle before they reached Kansas. The biographers of Sam Bass do not explain just how this happened, but it seems evident that the additional cattle were stolen somewhere along the trail. They finally got the herd to Dodge City all right, but for some reason did not sell them there. Just why they did not sell at Dodge City is not clear; Bard thinks it was "because the price was unsatisfactory, while W. P. Webb says that they went on to Nebraska "in order to escape some inquisitiveness as to title." However this may be, they finally sold out somewhere in Nebraska. They got enough money for the cattle to pay off the herders, and had about \$8,000 left.

Sam Bass and Joel Collins spent a few days in Ogallala, Nebraska—a wild cowtown full of gambling hells and whorehouses—and then hurried on to Deadwood, in the Dakota Territory. Everybody in Deadwood was talking about gold, and prospectors reported rich placer-mines all over the Black Hills country. Sam and Joel caught the gold fever. Their pockets were full of money, but the big talk they heard in Deadwood made their \$8,000 seem like nothing at all. Sam and Joel decided to become gold miners, but the ground was covered with snow at the moment, and it was too cold to do any digging. They concluded that they would just stick around Deadwood for a while. The mercury stuck at 30 below zero that Winter, and this seemed pretty chilly to the boys from Texas.

The gamblers got some of their money, since the card-sharps around Deadwood were of a different caliber than those which Bass had known in Denton. Joel acquired an interest in a bawdy-house, and both he and Sam invested in a worthless mining claim. Finally they bought two wagons and tried hauling freight from Dodge City to Yankton and Deadwood. All of these ventures flopped, and finally Sam and Joel Collins find themselves with no money at all, and still in debt for some of the cattle they had driven up from Texas.

It was at this time that they talked over their troubles with Jack Davis, a tin-horn gambler who had once helped to rob a stage-coach in Nevada. Davis suggested that, since the gold from the mines was being shipped out by stage, the logical way to recoup their fortunes was to stick up a few stages. Along with several other ruffians they decided

in favor of this enterprise, but they were all so poor that they had to go out and steal horses to ride before beginning a career of banditry. Three of the men got cold feet, however, and one accidentally shot himself in the leg. Only five showed up for the first robbery—Bass, Collins, Jim Berry from Missouri, Frank Towle, and a man known only as Reddy.

It was March 25, 1877, when they rode out to a place about three miles from Deadwood, armed to the teeth and masked with big red handkerchiefs. The Cheyenne stage came along, piloted by Johnny Slaughter, a veteran stage-driver. When the bandits shouted at him, Slaughter pulled up as best he could, but Reddy became excited and shot him to death with buckshot. The reins fell from Slaughter's hand and the team ran wildly into Deadwood. The coach bounced over the rocks so violently that two passengers were thrown out, but the box containing \$15,000 rode safely into town, leaving the frustrated road-agents cursing beside the trail. Joel Collins was so angry that he threatened to kill Reddy, who fled the town that night. The authorities offered a reward for the killers of Johnny Slaughter, but it seems that nobody suspected Sam Bass and his friends.

That summer it appears that Bass stuck up seven more stages, with Collins, Jack Davis, and Tom Nixon nearly always at his side. But they never had any luck, and got nothing but a few gold watches and small sums of money carried by the passengers. The stage-coach company had become pretty clever in managing the gold shipments, and the Bass gang always found the treasure-boxes empty. Once Collins believed that a large amount of gold-dust must be concealed in a certain coach, and he cut the vehicle all to pieces with an axe, but found nothing. Finally Frank Towle was shot dead by a guard, while trying to stop a stage over in Wyoming. Bass meditated upon this for a while, and finally announced his opinion that stage-robbing didn't pay. "I'm gettin' tired," said he, "of riskin' my neck for flapjack money an' a few brass watches."

The officers at Deadwood had evidently begun to suspect Bass and Collins of some connection with the stage-robberies, so Sam decided to leave the Black Hills and return to Nebraska. It is believed that Jack Davis conceived the idea of robbing the Union Pacific train, but it was Joel Collins who worked out the plan and led the enterprise. Everybody knew that big shipments of gold were handled by the express company, but there had never been any attempt to rob the trains in that region. As for Sam Bass, he was sick and tired of stopping stage-coaches, and expressed himself as being ready for anything.

Besides Sam Bass and Collins, the reorganized gang included Jack Davis, Jim Berry, Tom Nixon and Bill Heffridge. On the night of September 19, 1877, all six of these men waited for the east-bound train at Big Spring, about 20 miles west of Ogallala, Nebraska. Collins had ridden into town the day before, and bought several big red handkerchiefs from F. M. Leech, who ran a little neighborhood store. Wearing these handkerchiefs as masks, the robbers slipped into Big Spring station, broke up the telegraph instrument, and forced the telegrapher to flag the train with a red lantern.

When the train stopped, two men pulled the engineer and fireman out of the cab, and threw water into the firebox so that the train could not be started. Then they took the poor telegrapher to the express car, and forced him to call out the express messenger. When the messenger

opened the door, the bandits knocked him down and took his pistol away. The big safe was said to contain \$200,000 in gold dust, but the messenger swore that he could not open it. He did unblock a little safe, from which Collins took about \$500 in greenbacks. Meanwhile two other bandits had gone through the train and taken \$1,300 from the passengers, also a hatful of gold watches. Back in the express car Sam stumbled upon three wooden boxes. He broke one of these open to find it full of bright new twenty-dollar gold pieces, all dated 1877. The three boxes contained \$60,000 in all. "This is our meat," cried Sam, "an' to hell with the big safe!"

The six robbers rode away from the train in high good humor, and buried the gold on the bank of a stream near Ogallala. With plenty of greenbacks to spend, they loafed about Ogallala for several days. The Wells Fargo company offered a reward of \$10,000 for the capture of the robbers, but Bass and his friends felt perfectly safe. It appears that the only man who suspected them was F. M. Leech, the storekeeper who had sold Collins the big red handkerchiefs. Leech said nothing, but snooped around a camp where Bass and Collins had stopped overnight, and found a little piece of new red cloth in the ashes. This cloth matched the handkerchiefs that he had sold the strangers. Before Leech could do any more detective work, the outlaws divided the loot into three portions and separated. Joel Collins and Heffridge rode down the old trail toward San Antonio. Jim Berry and Nixon started back to Missouri, where Berry had a wife and family. Sam Bass and Jack Davis decided to head for Denton, Texas. Bass planned to pay his debts and set himself up in some honest business. If all went well, he intended to rejoin Collins later on, perhaps at San Antonio. If things did not go well, he had some idea of crossing the border to spend the rest of his life in Mexico.

Joel Collins and Bill Heffridge rode carelessly down the Western trail. Their portion of the gold was wrapped in an old pair of overalls tied on a pack-horse. They did not know that F. M. Leech, the little storekeeper of Ogallala, had wired their descriptions and all that he could find out about them to the Wells Fargo people at Omaha. These men had sent out warnings and descriptions to officers all over the West. A man named Beardsly was sheriff of Ellis county, Kansas, at the time. He started out with ten cavalymen from Fort Hays, and came up with Collins and Heffridge at Buffalo Station, on the Kansas Pacific railroad. "Well, what do you want?" said Collins to the sheriff. Beardsly answered that he was looking for two train-robbers, but was not sure about the identification. He did not place Collins and Heffridge in formal arrest.

"Gentlemen," said the sheriff, "please come back to the telegraph office with me, until I can make sure about this. It will take only a few minutes. If you are not the robbers, you have nothing to fear." Collins shrugged his shoulders. "You're wrong, Sheriff," he said easily. "But we'll come, of course. What else can we do? But you'll find that we are no robbers, just two Texas boys, tryin' to get back home." Before the station was reached, Collins and Heffridge exchanged some secret signal, and snatched out their revolvers at the same instant. But the cavalymen were old hands at this sort of thing, and killed both bandits before they could fire a shot.

Not much money was found in the dead men's pockets, and the sheriff was still uncertain about their identity. After a while he

happened to notice the pack-horse, quietly grazing some distance away. In the pack he found more than \$20,000 in gold, all double-eagles dated 1877. The body of Heffridge was later identified as that of William Potts, who came originally from Pottstown, Pennsylvania.

Meanwhile Jim Berry and the man called Nixon were heading for Kansas City, Missouri. The little merchant Leech followed them all the way from Ogallala. "The amateur detective," writes Gard, "was dressed in an outlandish manner. He wore an old pair of shoes, pants that were almost worn out, a new hat, and a loose coat with the tail cut off. Under his coat he had a pistol, and two belts full of cartridges." Berry got off the train at Mexico, Missouri, and visited three different banks, exchanging \$9,000 gold for currency. He bought some new clothes, and sent \$300 worth of groceries to his wife who lived in the country about 15 miles from town. He told several old acquaintances that he had made a lot of money in the gold fields.

As soon as the banks learned that the gold was stolen, the detectives from St. Louis arrived in Mexico. They finally cornered Berry in a patch of woods, and shot him in the leg with a load of buckshot. They found \$2,840 in his pockets. He did not seem to be seriously hurt, so they took him into Mexico and locked him up. A preacher inquired if he did not regret having become an outlaw and a robber, whereupon Berry answered: "No, I'll be damned if I regret anything I ever done." He did not talk much, but said that Nixon had gone to Chicago. Berry's leg did not mend properly, and blood poison set in, so that he died a few days later. Just before Berry's death, the storekeeper Leech came storming in, shouting that he had trailed Berry through three states and was entitled to most of the reward offered for the robber's capture.

Probably it is true that Nixon went to Chicago, and later escaped across the border into Canada. He had always claimed to be a Canadian. He got clear away with his share of the loot, anyhow, and nothing more was ever heard of him.

Sam Bass and Jack Davis rode south across the prairies, using the two sacks of gold as weights to anchor their ponies at night. They knew nothing of Leech's detective work, and had not heard of the doom that had fallen on Collins, Heffridge, and Berry. In a Kansas village they traded one saddle-horse for a rattletrap buggy or "hack," and the other for a plow-horse and a set of harness. Now they put the gold under the seat, covered with some dirty blankets. They concealed their weapons too, except for one rifle. In southern Kansas they met some soldiers who were looking for train-robbers. But the officer in charge had been told that the outlaws were riding good horses and leading a pack-mule loaded with gold. So he paid little attention to these shabby fellows crawling along in their dilapidated buggy. Bass said later that he and Davis camped with the soldiers for several nights, adding that he "felt pretty safe with them."

The trip through the Indian Territory was uneventful. Bass and Davis stopped to rest their old nag occasionally, fished in the clear streams, and shot deer and turkey which they traded to the settlers for flour and other food. There is a tradition that Bass told people at this time his name was Bushong—Gard spells it Bushon. They left the Territory and drove pretty well into Texas without any mishap. When they pulled into Fort Worth, Davis took his share of the money and went on to New Orleans by rail. It is said that Bass and Davis met once more, several months later, when Davis came up to Denton to see

his old partner. The story is that Davis tried to persuade Bass to accompany him to South America, but Sam decided not to go. Jack Davis drops out of the story here, though it is said that he lived a long and peaceful life somewhere south of the Border, and made a vast fortune in the cattle business.

After Davis boarded the train for New Orleans, Sam strolled about Fort Worth for a while, and did some serious thinking. By this time he had heard about what happened to Joel Collins and Bill Hefridge and Jim Berry. He must have known that the officers would be after him too. Sam still intended to go back to Denton, but resolved not to rush into a trap, or take any unnecessary risks. Having abandoned the old horse and buggy, he purchased a good pony with a saddle and bridle, choosing a saddle with a pair of stout leather pouches attached. He put the gold into these bags, and rode slowly toward Denton, being careful to keep away from the beaten trail. He stopped in a wilderness known as Cove Hollow, about 40 miles from Denton, and buried most of the money. He decided to camp in Cove Hollow for a while, before venturing into town.

Little by little Sam became bolder, and began to slip into Denton occasionally at night. Many people in the neighborhood had heard of the Big Spring robbery, but they had not linked it up with Sam Bass. One of Sam's first contacts in Denton was his old crony Henry Underwood, whom he met just outside the town. Underwood had been through a lot of trouble since the days of the Denton mare. He had shot two men down on the Concho, stolen some cattle, set a church afire, and committed several other indiscretions. He had been jailed four times, and was about ready to leave Denton for good. He was easily persuaded to move out to Cove Hollow and camp with Sam Bass.

Another old associate was Jim Murphy, who lived in a shack between Cove Hollow and Denton. Murphy visited Sam and Underwood at the camp, and they spent a lot of time at his place. Sam became rather chummy with several other members of the Murphy family. Later on Bass persuaded Sam Jackson, also of Denton, to give up his job and move out to camp in Cove Hollow. All of these boys wondered at Sam's sudden prosperity, but Sam explained that he had discovered a gold-mine in the Black Hills and sold out for a substantial sum of money. Perhaps they didn't altogether believe this, but that's what Sam told them at the time.

Life in the wilderness camp soon became monotonous, and Sam Bass, Underwood and Jackson mounted their ponies and set out for San Antonio. On the way they bought new clothes, new saddles, new six-shooters. It was about the middle of December, when they arrived at San Antonio. They embarked at once on a big celebration, and were having a very enjoyable time until Sam met a prostitute who slipped him a bit of information that she had picked up in the course of her professional activities. She said that three officers were in town, and they were looking for Sam Bass, to arrest him for the Big Spring robbery! One was a Pinkerton detective known as Tooney Waits, the others were Tom Gerrin and Billy Everheart, deputy sheriffs from the Denton vicinity. Gerrin was the only one who knew Bass by sight. Sam rewarded his informant liberally, then he and his two friends slipped out of town and headed toward Fort Worth. Sam was considerably upset, as if he realized for the first time that there was no turning back, and that he must be a robber and an outlaw from now on out.

Two or three days before Christmas, Bass and his pals stopped a

stage-coach a few miles out of Fort Worth, but the vehicle carried only two passengers, who had less than \$50 between them. Thoroughly disgusted, the three bandits went on their way in silence. Sam and Jackson decided to hole up at the camp, but Underwood rode on into Denton to see his family. Soon after he arrived a group of officers arrested him; they said that Underwood was really Tom Nixon, wanted for robbing a train at Big Spring, Nebraska. This arrest for a crime of which he was not guilty enraged Underwood to the point of frenzy. He shouted that he had never heard of Nixon and never been to Big Spring, but the posse took him to Nebraska in handcuffs and flung him into jail.

The arrest of Underwood frightened Bass and Jackson, and they decided to move camp. Oddly enough, they moved nearer to Denton, instead of farther away. The new place was in a piece of dense woods on Hickory Creek, only about 12 miles out of town. Although Sam certainly knew by this time that the officers were watching for him, he and Jackson often ventured into Denton. They always went at night, however, and kept out of sight as much as possible. Sam was not foolish enough to take his stolen money to the bank, as poor Berry had done in Mexico, Missouri. But he did use some of his \$20 gold pieces to buy groceries, whiskey, cartridges and other necessities. One night he and Jackson became a little drunk, so they rode down the street yelling and firing their pistols in the air. Tom Gerrin, a deputy sheriff who knew Bass, came running out of a bawdy-house and opened fire. All three men emptied their revolvers, it is said, but nobody was hit. The two outlaws regarded it as a narrow escape, however, and did not show themselves in Denton for several weeks. Jackson was all for leaving Texas, but Sam wouldn't hear of it. Nobody can say, at this late date, just why it was that Sam Bass was so determined to remain in the vicinity of Denton.

On the 26th of January, 1878, Bass and Jackson went down to a point near Weatherford, Texas, and stuck up a stage in broad daylight. They wore masks made of bandana handkerchiefs, and Jackson held a Winchester on the crowd while Sam flourished two revolvers. This time there were five passengers, and they handed over four gold watches and nearly \$500 in cash. This was certainly better than the water-haul they made near Fort Worth, and Jackson was jubilant. But Sam kept thinking of the great train-robbery at Big Spring, where six men had, in a few moments, taken more than \$60,000. He suggested that it might be a good idea to rob a few trains right here in Texas. Jackson considered this for a while, but was not enthusiastic. "It looks to me," said he, "as if train-robbin' might be kind of dangerous." Sam laughed at this observation, and often quoted it later on, but he did not deny that there was a certain hazard involved in the business.

Also, Sam reflected, a train-robbery might be dangerous indeed for two men—at least four would be much safer. Sam did not know any experienced train-robbers, but there were plenty of desperate characters in Texas, men who would try anything once just for the hell of it. There was Tom Spottswood, for example, who had murdered two gamblers in Missouri, and killed three Negroes since coming to Texas. Another likely candidate was Seab Barnes, who had served time for murder and was regarded as a reckless, dangerous man. Sam put the proposition bluntly to these boys, and they took him up on once. Seab Barnes was a bit worried because there was no railroad at Denton, or even in Denton county. But Sam and Jackson, who regarded themselves

as widely traveled men, reassured him about that. They would find a train for him, when the time came.

On February 22, 1878, Sam Bass and his three henchmen were waiting in a little clump of trees at Allen, on the Houston & Texas Central Railroad, about 20 miles north of Dallas. It was dark, and the masked men moved up to the little station without attracting any attention. They silenced the station-agent easily enough, and when the train stopped two robbers held up the engineer and fireman. Bass and the remaining outlaw hurried to the express car. The door was open, and the messenger was looking out. When he saw the robbers he drew his pistol and fired at them; the robbers returned the fire, but without any result. Shooting from behind some trunks, the express messenger held off the bandits until his ammunition was all gone, then he very sensibly surrendered. Bass threatened to kill him unless he opened the safe, so he opened it. The money was partly in silver coin, and the robbers got only about \$1,300. There were nearly 200 passengers on the train, but Bass thought best not to molest them. So the robbers took the \$1,300 from the express car, and rode away into the night.

The Express Company and the State of Texas offered rewards totalling \$1,500 each for the bandits. The express messenger insisted that he could identify one of them, whose mask had fallen off in the express car. Tom Spottswood was arrested, and the messenger made a positive identification, but no money was found on Spottswood. He spent almost two years in jail, and was tried several times, but the jury finally acquitted him. Seab Barnes was in poor health at the time of Spottswood's arrest. "With Seab sick, and that fool Tom in jail, we're kind of short-handed," said Bass. So they just sat around the camp on Hickory Creek for several weeks, playing stud poker to pass the time.

As soon as Barnes felt able to travel the three rode down to Hutchins, some 10 miles south of Dallas. Jackson held up the engineer and fireman as soon as the train stopped, also two tramps riding somewhere about the engine, who popped out inopportunely. Sam Bass and Seab Barnes ran to the express car, but the express messenger bolted the door and hid his sack of money—nearly \$4,000—in the stovepipe. Bass broke in the door, but found only about \$350 in silver, which he took. The mail clerk also had hidden most of the registered mail, so that a hasty search of his car yielded only about \$125. Some of the passengers on the train had revolvers, and when the robbers were about to leave there was a good deal of shooting. Sam and Jackson fired in the air as they rode away. The express messenger rushed out into the road, and was wounded by a brakeman, who mistook him for one of the robbers.

Bass and his colleagues felt themselves pretty safe in Denton county. They had many friends and acquaintances there, and were generous with their stolen funds. W. P. Webb says that Bass "spent more money than anyone in Denton county had seen in 10 years." The local sheriff was Dad Eagan, who knew Bass well, since he hired him years before to take care of the Eagan milk-cows. Sheriff Eagan knew that the Pinkerton men and the Express Company detectives suspected Bass of robbery. But no formal charge had been filed, and Eagan had no warrant to serve on Bass. Texas was accustomed to crime in those days—murder, lynching, cattle-rustling and the like—but this business of robbing trains was something new and glamorous. The public was interested in train-robbers, and rather sympathetic toward them. Most rural Texans hated the railroads and all other big corporations, and

even officers of the law were not too enthusiastic in their efforts to protect railroad property.

Shortly after the robbery of the Texas Central train at Hutchins, Henry Underwood appeared at the camp. He had broken out of jail at Kearney, Nebraska, where he had been confined because the officers mistook him for Tom Nixon, who had taken part in the train-robbery at Big Spring. With Underwood was a Missourian whose real name was McKeen, but who called himself Arkansaw Johnson. Johnson had been in jail with Underwood, and had escaped with him. These men had no money at all, and were ready for any sort of crime. So Bass welcomed them to the camp. Five men, said he, could always do a neater job than three, when it came to holding up trains.

The next robbery came off at Eagle Ford, only six miles out of Dallas. On April 4, 1878, about midnight, the gang stopped the Texas & Pacific express. Only four masked men showed themselves here. Bass, Barnes, and Arkansaw Johnson were certainly present, but the identity of the fourth man is in doubt. It seems likely that Jackson and Underwood both remained in Denton county that night.

The method used was the same as that of the previous robberies. Johnson lined up the station agent, the engineer, and the fireman on the platform. Bass and Barnes broke in the door of the express car, when the messenger failed to open it. There was an armed guard inside the car with the messenger, but neither guard nor messenger made any resistance. Bass found only about \$50 in the safe, when he forced the messenger to open it. The express company, as a precaution against robbers, had put the money in a "little poke" which was carried by a woman agent in the passenger-coach. The mail car was locked, but Bass started to set it afire, whereupon the mail-clerk opened the door. The man had hidden his registered letters, but Bass picked up about 30 small registered packages. Not a shot was fired at Eagle Ford, either by the robbers or by those whose task it was to protect the train. Bass was enraged because so little loot was obtained, but he made no effort to rob the passengers. Sam Bass, Seab Barnes, and Arkansaw Johnson were all back in the Hickory Creek camp next day.

On April 10, 1878, Sam Bass took his gang down to the little town of Mesquite, on the Texas & Pacific railroad, about 12 miles east of Dallas. There were seven masked men this time—Bass, Underwood, Jackson, Arkansaw Johnson, Barnes, Albert Herndon and Sam Pipes. The two last named were country boys, who had never attempted anything so ambitious as train robbery before. The train came in at 11 P. M., and everything started off as usual, with Jackson lining up the station-agent, engineer and fireman on the platform. The conductor, a Civil War veteran named Alvord, fired several shots from a pocket-pistol; unable to hit anybody, he threw it away in disgust and went back into the train for his army Colts. When Alvord began to "shoot around regardless" with this formidable weapon, one of the robbers stopped laughing long enough to shoot him through the shoulder. Upon this, Alvord threw down his pistol and stalked away into the town, calling for a physician to bind up his wound.

The express messenger, the baggage-master and two special guards all took to shooting at the robbers, and even the news-butcher was seen walking about with a revolver, but Bass called out to him, saying that they "didn't need any peanuts," so the boy went back into the coach without firing a shot. When the messenger refused to open the door of the express car, Sam brought kerosene from the engine and

poured it on the car, so that a lot of the stuff ran under the door, where the men inside it could smell it. Then he shouted loudly that he "aimed to set the whole shebang afire, and shoot the sons-of-bitches when they run out." When the messenger and guards heard Sam strike a match they surrendered at once. But meanwhile the messenger had hidden most of the company money in the stove, so that Sam only got \$150 and a few registered letters.

There was a certain amount of firing going on all this time, some of it from the guards in charge of a gang of convicts camped nearby, and some from the townspeople who had come down to see what was going on. A storekeeper named Gross rushed on the scene just at the end of the performance, and saw a man hiding behind a trestle. Instantly the storekeeper "snaked him out," and marched the poor fellow out into the light, shouting that he had captured Sam Bass single-handed! Nobody laughed louder than the real Bass when he saw that Gross had captured the fireman of the train, who had prudently taken shelter behind the trestle to avoid stray bullets. Sam got another laugh when the express messenger asked for a receipt, so that nobody should think that he had stolen the \$150 out of the express car!

The Bass gang rode away as usual, but Pipes was slightly wounded in the side. He and Herndon did not go to Denton county with the rest of the boys, but remained with some friends on a farm near Dallas. A few days later Pipes and Herndon were arrested by Captain June Peak of the Texas Rangers, who had finally been called into the case. The officers found the bullet-wound in Pipes' side, but he said it was a boil; later on, while a doctor probed the wound, he admitted that it was a bullet-hole, but that a friend had shot him accidentally. Pipes and Herndon were held for mail robbery, a federal offense, and locked in the jail at Tyler, about 100 miles east of Dallas.

Rural Texans in general did not ride on trains, or hold any particular prejudice against train-robbers, but the moneyed men in Dallas were worried about the Bass gang. Four train robberies in less than two months, all of them practically in the suburbs of Dallas! "Newspaper writers swarmed in," writes Webb, "and furnished the state more exciting news than it had known since Lee surrendered. The whole country was agog with rumors and expectations. Business men and bankers loaded up their shotguns and Winchesters and placed them conveniently behind the counters and beside the doors."

The state of excitement in what came to be called "the Sam Bass country" can hardly be realized today. People would not ride on trains, they would not send valuables by express, or trust money to the United States mails! Some even rode into town and drew their money out of the banks, preferring to bury it in the ground somewhere. "The city of Dallas," says Webb, "had become headquarters for all the detectives and bandit hunters of the country. United States Marshal Stillwell H. Russell was quartered at the Windsor Hotel with 19 special deputies. William Pinkerton, son of Alan, had a flock of his men at the LeGrand, and not a day passed that one or more Pinkertons did not make a trip to Denton to see if Bass was there. 'Sam seems to be their meat,' declared a reporter, 'and they will roll him over should they get the drop on him, as one of them said he is worth \$8,000 up North.' In addition, the express companies and railroads had their secret service men and special agents on the ground. To add to the confusion there were numerous self-appointed detectives who were ambitious to win the large rewards. It was estimated that not less than 150 Bass hunters were in

and around Denton county, and they had to be alert to keep from being shadowed and arrested by their fellows."

Wayne Gard, in his biography of Sam Bass, observes that "such events as the strawberry festival at the Christian Church and Bishop Alexander C. Garrett's lecture at the Episcopal Church failed to divert attention from the impending Bass war. Detectives, professionals and amateur, swarmed about the town day and night. Never had Dallas seen such a crop of false whiskers. As two men were riding through a business street at night, one dropped a long black beard. He immediately dismounted and recovered the appendage, and the two dashed out of town to some unknown destination."

Bass and his men had so many supporters in and about Denton that they felt reasonably secure. The local officers had bothered them little so far, and they were not afraid of any "foreign" detectives. But the Texas Rangers were something else again. The Dallas business men made such a row over the Bass robberies that the Governor of Texas finally sent Major John B. Jones, commander of the Rangers, into Denton county incognito on April 14, 1878, to investigate the situation. It was Captain June Peak, working openly as a Ranger, who arrested Pipes and Herndon—the two boys who participated in only one robbery, and who knew little about Bass and his friends. Major Jones walked cautiously at first, for he had been told that Bass had at least 60 men, some of them in positions of authority, who watched every stranger's movements and reported to the bandit chief every night.

On April 8 Captain Peak rode into Denton at the head of his Rangers, about 30 men in all. They had warrants for Bass, Barnes, Jackson, Underwood and Johnson. Sheriff Eagan deputized a lot of local men, and from this time forward he worked with the Rangers as best he could. The robbers knew all about this, of course, and watched the movements of the officers with field-glasses. The presence of the Rangers worried them, and they retreated to Sam's old camp in Cove Hollow.

The first exchange of shots between the outlaws and the Rangers was a long-range encounter. One of the Rangers fired at Sam—clear across Cove Hollow, a distance of perhaps 500 yards, and his first bullet struck the stock of Sam's rifle. It was a fluke, of course, but such accurate shooting horrified the bandits. "Let's get out of here," cried Sam, and the outlaws were soon out of sight among the trees. Sam was unhurt, but he was mighty thoughtful all evening. He just sat around, glumly fingering the bullet-hole in the stock of his Winchester.

The next day a deputy got a tip that the fugitives were camped in a patch of woods about four miles north of Denton, and sent for Sheriff Eagan. The sheriff came with 10 deputies, but the robbers saw them coming, and fled before they could get within shooting distance. Many local men had hitherto refused to take any part in the bandit chase, since they did not wish to associate with the Pinkertons or the Rangers, but when they learned that their own sheriff was out to get Bass they joined the posse at once.

"The town of Denton," says Gard, "had taken on the appearance of a military camp. Nearly every man who had a horse and a gun was on the warpath, ready to capture or drive out the brigands, who were believed to be camping in the jungle region where Hickory Creek joined Elm Fork, southeast of Denton. This area contained large swamps and was overgrown with briars, vines and timber that it was almost impenetrable for anyone not well acquainted with its narrow trails.

Thus far, the pursuers had done a great deal more riding than the pursued. One man who caught a glimpse of Bass said he was sitting quietly on his horse, smiling as slyly as an old fox while the posses milled about in search of his trail."

Early one morning a deputy found the tracks of shod horses in the Hickory Creek swamp, "so fresh that the dew had been knocked off'n the grass." This swamp was a dense jungle, and nobody could possibly ride a horse into it, but the bandits must have led their mounts in somehow. A posse gathered at once and crawled into the almost impenetrable thicket. Nobody saw or heard a thing as the robbers escaped, but the officers found two saddle-horses, some army blankets, a frying-pan, and a coffee pot in the warm ashes of a campfire. The robbers had carefully peeled the bark from the wood they burned, so as to produce a minimum of smoke.

Several times members of the posse mistook each other for bandits, and some officers fired at their fellows repeatedly, but nobody was seriously hurt. One horse was killed, and a Dallas youth was shot through the foot, but it appears that the youth shot himself accidentally. Bass and his men could have killed many of the pursuers from ambush, but they made no attempt to do so. When the Hickory Creek bottom became so full of officers that they could not be dodged any longer, the outlaws rode 100 miles west into Stephens county, where they camped near a town called Breckenridge.

They had no difficulty in obtaining new camping equipment and provisions in the Breckenridge neighborhood. The Texas robberies had not been profitable, but Sam still had plenty of money, mostly in gold pieces from the hold-up at Big Spring, Nebraska. It was some of these \$20 gold pieces, suddenly appearing in the hands of poverty-stricken farmers, which attracted the officers' attention to the new hangout. The sheriff of Stephens county sallied out with a posse and engaged the bandits at long range, but nobody was hurt. Four local men who armed themselves and rode out to win the big rewards were captured by Bass, who took their weapons away but gave them a jug of whiskey in exchange. When the Rangers came along next day they found these men still drunk, telling tall stories about their experience with the train-robbers.

Bass and his friends disappeared for a few days after this episode, and many people thought they had left the country for good. But they had only moved over into Palo Pinto county, where they were soon betrayed by more of the 1877 gold pieces. The Rangers and Sheriff Eagan's men went galloping through the brush wherever the bandits were reported, in various parts of Palo Pinto, Young, Hood and Jack counties. Suddenly the Bass gang appeared in Denton county, right in the middle of the town of Denton! They dashed up front of the livery-stable, and Sam told the man to saddle two horses which the posse had "stolen" from the Bass camp on Hickory Creek. One stableman made a hostile movement, and Jackson bopped him on the head with a pistol. Somebody else saddled the horses, and the gang dashed out of town without a shot being fired. The whole place was swarming with detectives and officers, but nobody ever thought that Bass would ride boldly into town in broad daylight.

The townsfolk reported that there were seven riders in the Bass gang now, and the two new ones were recognized as Henry Collins and Charlie Carter. These boys had not been connected with any of the robberies, but young Collins' brother Billy had been arrested on

suspicion because he was known to be a friend of Bass. Sheriff Eagan was in bed when Sam made his raid on the livery-stable, but he got up and led a posse of 50 men about Denton county all day, without catching a glimpse of the bandits. The weather was bad, it rained most of the time, and tracking was impossible.

Next day the gang stopped near Pilot Knob to buy some eggs from an old woman; Sam gave her one of the famous \$20 gold pieces, and told her to keep the change. She still had the gold in her hand when the posse came along, but she kept the hand closed and told them nothing. There were only six men in the group which came within sight of the Bass gang, and as soon as their leader received a flesh wound in the thigh the officers fell back. One of them started to ride for help, and the bandits ran him down. They didn't shoot this man, but took his saddle and bridle, turned his horse loose, and told him to walk home and let train robbers alone hereafter.

More officers arrived, however, and soon the bandits had 40 armed men almost at their heels. There was a lot of shooting, and it seems almost miraculous that nobody was hurt. Many persons have said that Bass and his men fired over the pursuers' heads. It may be that some of the officers were not trying seriously to kill anybody. Shortly after dark two posses began shooting at each other, each evidently convinced that they were attacking the bandits. In this exchange of fire, an officer named Wetzel was shot in the leg. Meanwhile the robbers somehow slipped away, and returned by a roundabout trail to the jungle on Hickory Creek.

Two days later a posse led by Sheriff Eagan employed an expert tracker named Medlin. Moving slowly through the brush, early in the morning, they surprised the outlaws at breakfast. It was there that the first blood of the "Bass war" was shed. Arkansas Johnson was shot in the neck—a slight wound, but painful. Underwood got a bullet in the upper arm. Young Carter was shot in the leg. One member of the posse received a flesh wound in the shoulder. Three horses were killed—the one ridden by Underwood, and two belonging to the officers. The bandits lost all their provisions and camping equipment. As they rode away into the thickets, Underwood leaped up behind one of the other horsemen. Next morning the whole gang appeared in the town of Bolivar. Here they bought fresh horses, some new clothes, 1,000 cartridges, and a good supply of food. The storekeeper recognized the bandits and was reluctant to sell them anything, but they just took what they wanted and told him to add up the bill. He did so, and Bass placed a little pile of money on the counter.

Gard reports a bit of horseplay which occurred the same afternoon. "After resting a short time," he writes, "the outlaw band rode off to the northwest, toward Cove Hollow. On the road they had a little fun by capturing a man named Dawson, who was riding in to join Sheriff Eagan's forces. After searching him for papers, they gave him a mock trial, at the close of which they returned his gun and told him to run along or he would be too late. When the man remounted, however, he found that one of the outlaws had swapped saddles with him."

Many of the amateur bandit-hunters wearied of the chase after a few days, and went back to their farms. A lot of Rangers resigned too. They had enlisted to protect Texas against the Indians and Mexicans. They hated cattle-rustlers, but had nothing against train-robbers or bank-robbers. Many rural Texans, at this time, regarded banks and railroads as great public enemies, likely to ruin the whole country.

On May 12, 1878, Captain Peak's company of Rangers, together with a sheriff's posse, stopped to water their horses at a little stream called Salt Creek. This was in Wise county, a few miles west of Cottondale. Some of the officers happened to look up, and suddenly they saw the outlaws lying on the ground in a little clearing. Apparently they were all asleep, with their horses tied nearby. The Rangers fired instantly, and killed Arkansaw Johnson. Poor Johnson never knew what hit him, and Sergeant Tom Floyd was credited with the killing. Sam Bass and the remaining five men sprang up and returned the fire. Underwood caught a horse and rode away, with bullets cutting twigs all around him. The other bandits took to their heels and disappeared in the brush. The Rangers killed two horses and captured four.

Henry Underwood had been getting fed up with Bass and his gang for some time. The fact that they had held up four trains and got practically no money disgusted him. Bass was a good fellow, he said, but plainly not cut out to lead a band of desperadoes. Bass ought to be running a livery-stable somewhere, or maybe a bowling alley. Bass's refusal to leave Denton county would get them all killed sooner or later, Underwood had often said. The death of Johnson at Salt Creek was bad enough, and now the other damned fools had lost their horses! This was the last straw, and Underwood rode away from the gang without a backward glance. He never saw Sam Bass again.

Young Henry Collins and Charlie Carter, who were not really outlaws at all, also decided to return to their homes. These boys had not taken part in any of the robberies, but had joined the gang after the Mesquite hold-up. The old-timers saw them go without any protest. Seab Barnes, Sam Bass and Frank Jackson were all that was left of the Bass gang now, although some city newspapers were still claiming that Sam had 50 or 60 men under his command. The three bandits somehow obtained fresh horses and rode back to Denton county.

Among those who had been arrested for harboring Sam Bass were Henderson Murphy and his son Jim, both residents of Denton county. It is true that Sam had stopped at the Murphy house on occasion, and that Jim Murphy had spent some of Sam's stolen money. Sam had several times invited Jim to join the band, but there is no evidence that Murphy had participated in any of the robberies. Old Henderson Murphy was completely innocent of any wrong-doing in connection with the Bass gang. Nevertheless, both Murphys were thrown into jail at Tyler as accomplices of Sam Bass.

When Sam, Barnes and Jackson returned to Cove Hollow, two or three days after Arkansaw Johnson was killed at Salt Creek, they rode up to Jim Murphy's house. Jim was at home, and told the robbers that he was out on bond. Sam advised him to jump the bond and join up with the gang, since he was sure to be convicted if he stood trial at Tyler. "We'll be rich again in a few weeks," said Sam. "We're goin' to take up bank-robbin' from now on. An' the first strike we make you can send money back here to fix things, so your bondsmen won't lose a cent." Jim Murphy appeared to be undecided, and said that he wanted a day or two in order to think the matter over.

What had really happened at Tyler was that Jim Murphy tried to get bail, but was unable to do so. In order to obtain his release he called in the Rangers, and proposed to join Sam's gang and then betray them all to the officers. In return for this treachery, the charges against Jim and his father were to be dismissed, and Jim was to be cut in on the reward money besides. With this understanding, the officers

induced some local men to sign Jim's bond, but did not tell them anything about the real purpose of the action. Here is an extract from a sworn statement which Jim Murphy made later:

"I hereby certify that on or about the 21st of May, 1878, whilst held in Tyler for trial as an accomplice of Sam Bass and other train robbers, I proposed to Major Jno. B. Jones through Walter Johnson and Capt. June Peak that I thought I could assist in capturing the Bass party by joining them, and putting them in a position where they could be captured. The Major then sent for me to come to his room where I had a long talk with him in the presence of Captain Peak and Walter Johnson, Deputy U. S. Marshal, after which he told me to wait there until he could have a talk with Judge Evans, U. S. District Attorney. He returned in half an hour and said that he had made an arrangement by which he could have the case against me dismissed. The agreement was that I should go off secretly the next morning before court met when it would be announced that I had run away, and forfeiture would be taken on my bond, but the District Attorney would protect my bondsmen. I then begged Major Jones to have the charges against my father dismissed also, as the old man did not have anything to do with Bass and his gang. He promised to talk to the District Attorney about it and have the case dismissed if he could."

When Jim disappeared from Tyler his bondsmen raised a great outcry, demanding that the Rangers make every effort to recapture him at once. One of these bondsmen wired local officers all over the country to be on the watch for Jim Murphy, and the newspapers denounced the Rangers for allowing him to get away. The Rangers naturally could not tell anybody about the secret arrangement they had made with Murphy. Local sheriffs knew nothing of it, and would have stopped Jim before he ever got to Cove Hollow, but for the fact that he had shaved off his beard and otherwise changed his appearance, so that even his old friends hardly recognized him in the streets.

Jim Murphy testified later that he "laid out in the brush" for two weeks, but was unable to find Bass until after the fight at Salt Creek, when the outlaws returned to Cove Hollow. When he did finally make contact with Bass, he had no way of sending a message to the officers. So he was forced to join the robbers and ride with them for an indefinite period. Jim did not like this much, because the Bass gang was now so hot, and had so many Rangers and detectives and sheriffs on their trail, that it was "plumb risky for a feller to go a-ridin' round with 'em."

Soon after Jim agreed to join the gang, and while Bass, Barnes and Jackson were camped not far from the Murphy house, Sheriff Everheart of Grayson county met Murphy in the road. Murphy told Everheart to bring a big posse and capture the robbers that very night, but for some reason the sheriff and his posse failed to appear. When the gang started out the next morning, Jim Murphy rode along with the rest of them.

At one house where they stopped overnight, Barnes told the farmer that they were Rangers, sent out by Captain Peak to kill or capture Sam Bass. The old man scowled at this and spoke up boldly, saying that he "thought a heap" of Bass, although he had never seen the robber. Sam was much pleased by this tribute, and intimated to Murphy that there were thousands of other Texans who felt the same way. It wasn't so much that they were for Sam Bass, although there was a certain amount of glamour about any successful bandit in those days.

But the truth is that the average poor farmer or cattleman hated the railroads and all other big corporations which were, in his opinion, run by Yankees or foreigners for the exploitation of honest Texans.

After stealing several saddle-horses, the Bass gang rode on into Dallas county. Coming to a little crossroads store, Sam bought a sack of cheap candy. Some loafers were discussing the hard times, and one young rustic said that he had half-a-mind to quit farming and join Sam Bass, as train-robbing seemed to pay better than scratching in the dirt. The crowd laughed at this remark, and Sam himself laughed louder than anybody. He traded the boy some candy for a ripe peach. Later on Sam said to Barnes: "What do you reckon that fool would have done if I had told him who I was, and showed him a few of them twenties? I'll bet you could have knocked his eyes off with a board!"

Despite the seriousness of their position, the bandits all seemed cheerful enough. According to Webb's account "there was much banter and merrymaking on the way South. Sam always appeared in good spirits. At one town they went into a saloon for beer, and it was on that bar that Sam threw his last twenty-dollar gold piece of '77. 'There's the last piece of '77 gold I have,' said he. 'It hasn't done me the least bit of good, but that is all right. I will get some more in a few days. So let it gush!' It all goes in a lifetime."

One day Henry Collins and another man came into the Bass camp, and announced bluntly that Jim Murphy was a spy, who had sold out Bass to the Rangers. Sam was not inclined to believe this at first, but he sent Seab Barnes into town to investigate. Seab came back in a towering rage, and reported that it was all true. "Jim's a damn' traitor," he cried. "A marshal has telegraphed to people in Fort Worth that Jim figures on getting us to stick up a bank, where the Rangers will be laying for us. That's how come Jim to get out of the jail-house at Tyler. That's what they turned the son-of-bitch loose for!"

Barnes was all for killing Jim Murphy right then and there, and Sam agreed reluctantly. Asked if he had anything to say before he died, Jim answered in the affirmative. "Listen, boys," he said earnestly, "you ought to know I aint no traitor. What I told Major Jones don't cut no ice. You know it was you boys that got me into jail, and I had to get out the best I could. So this here Major Jones said he would let me and Pappy out, if I would help him catch Sam Bass. Well, I told him yes, of course. What would you have done, if you and *your* Pappy was locked up in that jail-house,"

Frank Jackson, who had always been friendly with Murphy, remarked that he did not blame Jim at all. "Nobody wants to lay in jail, just for the lack of a few words," said he. "If it had been me, I'd have done the same as Jim. And you boys know that I aint no traitor." Sam said nothing, but looked at Barnes. "No," said Barnes, "we know that *you* aint no traitor, Jackson. But you're wrong about this feller Murphy. I think we'd better kill him right now." Sam said nothing, but he drew his pistol.

At this point Jackson stood up. "Boys," he said slowly, "if you're a-goin' to kill Murphy, you might as well kill me too. We got this boy into jail, and then we talked him into joinin' up with us. We'll all get killed soon enough, without fightin' amongst ourselves. But I tell you plain, the man that shoots Jim Murphy will have me to fight!"

Sam Bass sighed. "Nobody wants to fight you, Frank," he said heavily. "If you're so damn' certain that Jim is all right, we better let

him alone. But I aint so sure..." Seab Barnes scowled at everybody and said no more, but it was easy to see that his opinion of Murphy was unchanged. ~~Henry Collins and the stranger had taken no part in this talk.~~ But when they saw that Murphy was to be spared, they refused to have anything more to do with the gang. Collins shook hands with Sam and Barnes. "Take care of yourselves, boys," he said in parting. "I'm afraid you're a-ridin' to a fall."

The four outlaws went their way, but there was no more joking or skylarking along the trail. Frank Jackson and Jim Murphy rode ahead, close together. Jim was pretty badly scared, and with good reason. Sam Bass and Seab Barnes brought up the rear. They said very little. Their money was mostly gone now, and Sam was disgusted with train-robbery, since it did not even keep a man in spending money! Texas was about played out anyhow, so far as Sam Bass was concerned. He figured the best thing would be to stick up some small-town bank, and then go to Mexico; everything was cheap in Mexico, and they could all spend the rest of their lives in peace. Sam was thinking of good old Jack Davis, who had taken his share of the Big Spring loot and drifted down into South America. Perhaps Jack had the right idea, after all.

Murphy could not sleep that night. He had no qualms of conscience because of his treachery, but he was desperately afraid that Seab Barnes would kill him. He didn't like the way Barnes was always fiddling with his Bowie-knife. The night passed without any further difficulty, however. In the morning it was decided to move on to the town of Rockwall. There was a nice little bank in Rockwall, said Bass with a smile. They did not ride boldly into Rockwall, but camped in a clump of trees at the edge of town. Looming up in one of the streets was a gallows, which had been built to accomodate a chap who had murdered the sheriff a year or two before. It was the first regular gallows Sam Bass had ever seen, and he gazed at it soberly for a long time. Perhaps he shivered a little. Sam was not without a degree of superstition, and a gallows is not a particularly good omen.

Barnes went into town and got some canned fruit, cheese and crackers at a little store, and they ate dinner at the camp. But Barnes didn't like the looks of the gallows either. They decided to give Rockwall a wide berth, and did not stop for the night until they reached a point three or four miles the other side of town. Next morning they rode on and camped not far from Terrill, about 40 miles from Dallas. At this camp Barnes came in with some secret news, which he imparted to Sam in a whisper. Somehow Barnes convinced Sam that Jim Murphy was an immediate danger, and that the only safe procedure was to kill Murphy at once. But Frank Jackson managed to talk them out of it, as he had done before. Gard says that this time Jackson actually stood with his body between Murphy and the two drawn revolvers, and made a regular speech in Murphy's defence. Murphy was sound asleep at the moment, and did not know what was going on until the crisis had passed.

There were two banks in Terrill, and Bass and Jackson rode in to look them over. They bought some new clothes and provisions in Terrill, but decided against "doin' any business" in the place. Next day they came to an inland town called Kaufman City, and this time they all rode in. Barnes and Murphy bought some clean clothes here, and they all got shaved and ate their dinner in the hotel diningroom. But there

was no bank in Kaufman City, and no stores or business houses big enough to be worth robbing.

They crossed the Trinity River near Trinidad and rode on to a place called Ennis. Sam Bass and Jim Murphy went into the town, while Jackson and Barnes made camp. The little bank in Ennis did not suit Sam. He and Murphy had dinner at the hotel, and then returned to camp. Next day they all started out for Waco, about 100 miles south of Dallas. Waco was quite a town in those days, with a population of 5,500, and three good banks.

Jackson and Murphy strode into one of these banks to get change for a bill, and Jackson was all for robbing it at once.* He told Sam that it would be a push-over, but Murphy was not so enthusiastic. Murphy had no chance to write a letter to the Rangers, or even get in touch with any local officers. The officers who knew that he was a traitor had heard nothing from him, and had no means of finding out where he was. He was afraid that the Rangers might think he had turned bank-robber in real earnest. Jim had no wish to risk his life in a bank robbery anyhow. So he said that the Waco bank looked like a bad job to him, and he thought Sam should go into town and look the situation over for himself.

Next morning Sam Bass and Barnes rode into Waco, and spent most of the day in studying the bank. Neither of them could see anything wrong with it, and they agreed with Jackson in every particular. Murphy was in something of a panic. He couldn't back out, and he was watched so closely that he could not communicate with the officers. He certainly did not want any part of a bank hold-up. Somehow or other, probably by playing upon Sam's superstitious belief in dreams and "hunches," he persuaded the gang that it would be bad luck to meddle with anything in Waco. The thing to do, he told Sam, is to knock off some smaller bank, like the one down at Round Rock.

When the four horsemen set out for Round Rock, Jim Murphy the traitor was still in a bad spot. He was afraid the bank at Round Rock would be robbed before he could get word to the officers. In desperation he sold a stolen horse to a crossroads blacksmith, and signed a bill-of-sale with his own name, in the hope that it would somehow come to the Rangers' attention, thus letting them know his whereabouts. Finally Murphy got away from the others long enough to write a letter to Major Jones of the Rangers, and another to Sheriff Everheart. In these letters he told the officers that Sam Bass, Seab Barnes and Frank Jackson were on their way to Round Rock, where they intended to rob the bank. Murphy must have got somebody to put these letters in the postoffice at Belton, since the postmark shows they were mailed there on July 13, 1872. Webb and other writers refer to a rumor that Sam Bass caught Murphy mailing the letters, but this seems unlikely. If Sam had seen Murphy mail a letter, he would probably have broken into the postoffice then and there. And if he had found a letter addressed to Major Jones, it would have been too bad for Jim Murphy.

Whatever happened in the postoffice that day, Sam Bass was evidently satisfied that everything was all right, for all four men rode on together toward Round Rock. The town originally stood on the bank of Brush Creek, just opposite a big white boulder for which the place was named. But when the railroad came through in 1876 the settlement naturally shifted toward the railroad station, which was set on a ridge about a mile from the stream. The village on the creek was called Old Round Rock, while the modern town built along the

railroad was known as New Round Rock. The four robbers arrived in the night, and made camp near a graveyard in the outskirts of Old Round Rock.

Next day Sam and Jackson rode into Round Rock to look over the situation at the bank. They returned to camp very enthusiastic about the setup. Then Jim Murphy and Barnes went in, and also professed themselves as satisfied. At this time it appears that Barnes was finally convinced that Jim Murphy was not a spy at all. He admitted as much to Murphy, in the presence of Sam Bass and Jackson. So all was peace again in the bandits' camp. They talked the matter over and decided to rest in camp for a few days, so as to refresh their tired horses. Then they would go into town, rob the bank, and hit the trail for Mexico.

When Major Jones got Murphy's note he was at Austin, busy with the trial of Herndon and Pipes. He dropped everything and hurried down to Round Rock. He had three Rangers with him—Dick Ware, Chris Connor, and George Harrell. Posting these men in a building near the bank, he told them to keep out of sight until they saw or heard the robbers. Next he sent word to Lieutenant N. C. Reynolds at San Saba, ordering Reynolds to bring more Rangers to Round Rock at once. This done, he told Deputy Sheriff A. W. Grimes what was going on, also another local officer named Albert Highsmith. Then Morris Moore, a former Ranger, happened to come along, and Jones deputized him too. All of these men lay concealed about town, waiting for the bandits to make their first move.

On the 18th of July, 1878, Jackson rode into town and caught a glimpse of a man who looked vaguely like a Ranger. When Bass and Barnes heard about this, they slipped into Round Rock and looked about carefully, but saw nothing suspicious. They returned to camp and said that Jackson must have been mistaken. It was decided to rob the bank the following afternoon. The plan was for Sam and Barnes to go inside and demand change for a bill. Then Sam was to produce his pistol, while Barnes gathered up the money and put it in a sack. Murphy and Jackson were to stay in the street outside, and not even display a weapon unless somebody tried to interfere.

It was about 4 o'clock the next afternoon when the four horsemen rode into Round Rock. Bass, Jackson and Barnes tied their horses in the alley, and went to buy some tobacco in a little store near the bank. Jim Murphy lagged behind as far as he could, and did not enter the store. Deputy Sheriff Grimes did not know any of the robbers by sight, but he evidently saw something suspicious in their appearance. He sauntered up to Bass, touched him on the shoulder, and said something about "too many pistols." Instantly all three outlaws fired, and Grimes fell dead without having even drawn his gun. Morris Moore sprang into the doorway and emptied his six-shooter, one of his bullets smashing Sam's right hand. Barnes shot Moore through the lungs, disabling him.

As the three robbers dashed out of the store, Rangers appeared and began firing from all directions. Major Jones came running up to join in the fight. Many citizens hurried to the scene unarmed, thinking that one of the buildings was afire, since a volley of pistol-shots was the customary fire-alarm in those days. Just as the outlaws reached their horses somebody shot Seab Barnes through the head. Ranger Dick Ware always claimed that his bullet killed Barnes, and Major Jones gave him the official credit for the killing. A moment later Sam Bass was shot through the body, and fell to his knees. Frank Jackson

12-44-X

was unhurt, and quite unhurried. He helped Sam to mount, then sprang on his own horse, and the two bandits fled toward the camp. Galloping through Old Round Rock they passed Jim Murphy, who sat in the doorway of a deserted store building, with his head in his hands.

The Rangers and the sheriffs pursued the bandits until darkness stopped the chase, but without any luck. They knew that Bass was badly hurt, however, and were confident that they could catch him next day. So they rode back into Round Rock, where Jim Murphy had morosely identified the body of Seab Barnes.

Only three miles away, in a thicket on the bank of Brush Creek, Sam Bass lay on the ground. "It aint no use, Frank," he said to Jackson. "I can't make it no further. You might as well ride on." Jackson tried to make Sam comfortable, and bound up the wounds as best he could. He tied a horse nearby, too, so that if Sam *should* get to feeling better, there might still be a chance for him to escape. The wounded bandit fell into a stupor then, and Jackson rode away in the darkness.

When the Rangers came along next morning they saw a man lying under a liveoak tree, at the edge of a little prairie north of town. They thought he was a railroad worker and paid no attention, since they did not expect to find Bass so near Round Rock. Sam raised his left arm as they approached. "Don't shoot," said he. "I'm Sam Bass." They took him into town, and got him the best medical attention that was available, but it seemed obvious that Sam Bass was dying.

Major Jones sat beside the bandit for hours, trying to get him to talk about his friends and companions, but Sam was wary. He spoke freely enough of Joel Collins, Bill Heffridge, Jim Berry, Seab Barnes and others who were dead. But he had nothing to say about any bandits who were still alive. He wouldn't talk even of Jim Murphy the traitor, just grinned wolfishly when Murphy's name was mentioned. Finally the doctor told Sam that his number was up, and that he could not live more than an hour or so. Major Jones made one last plea for information that would lead to the capture of other outlaws. "No, I reckon not," said Sam calmly. "It's ag'in my profession for a feller to blow on his friends." After a while he added "If a man knows anything, he ought to die with it in him." Major Jones said no more, and after a pause Sam opened his eyes wonderingly. "The world is a-bobbin' around," he sighed. A few minutes later Sam Bass the train-robber was gone. He died July 21, 1878, on his 27th birthday.

Sam's body was buried in the Round Rock cemetery beside that of Seab Barnes. A year or two later Sam's sister Sally came down from Indiana and put up a marble tablet, marked with his name and the dates of his birth and death. On Barnes' grave somebody placed a rough piece of native stone with the inscription: "Seaborn Barnes, Died July 19, 1878. He was right bower to Sam Bass"—a classic in frontier epigraphy.

As for Jim Murphy, the charges against him were dismissed and the court restored his bondsmen's money, but Jim seems to have been cheated out of his share in the reward. He furnished the material for several biographies of Sam Bass, and made a little money in this way. But his old friends despised him as a traitor, and the self-respecting people of Denton would have nothing to do with him. He suffered from some sort of an eye infection, which was evidently painful. He used to sit around on the courthouse steps with an old sombrero pulled down over his eyes. About a year after the fight at Round Rock, Jim Murphy died of poison administered by his own hand. And most Texans thought that it was damned good riddance.

